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This book comes from the personal library of Dr. Guido Kisch (b. 1889) one of the 20th Century's outstanding scholars in Jewish history.

Kisch, the author of over 15 books and over 300 articles, fled Europe in 1939, where he had co-edited such journals as the *Jahrbuch fur die Geschichte der Juden in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik* and the *Zeitschrift fur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*. In response to Nazi closure of Germany's major Jewish scholarly periodicals, Kisch founded the journal *Historia Judaica* which became an important and respected publication in its own right.

In 1950 Kisch received the I. Hirschfield award for "Best non-fiction work on Jewish History" for his *THE JEWS OF MEDIEVAL GERMANY*. Kisch's father, Rabbi Alexander Kisch, had led the Maisel Synagogue in Prague from 1885 until his death in 1917, and is best known today as the publisher of the first Hagaddah to use modern illustrations, now known as the Kisch Hagaddah.

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CENTRAL ASIAN COLLECTANEA, No. 1

Rudolf Loewenthal, Editor

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THE JUDEO-MUSLIM MARRANOS OF BUKHARA

TWO RUSSIAN ARTICLES

Translation and introduction

by

Rudolf Loewenthal

Georgetown University

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Central Asian Collectanea, No. 1

Washington, D.C. - 1958

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
Introduction	1 - 4
"Research on the history of the native Jews of Bukhara and Turkestan, the "chela," and of part of the Mountain Tadzhiks," by D. Iofan	5 - 8
"On the origin of a Judeo-Muslim community in Bukhara," by I. M. Babkhanov	9 - 13

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1417 N Street, N.W.
Washington 5, D.C.

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The Jews of Bukhara
according to oral tradition

THE JUDEO-MUSLIM MARRANOS OF BUKHARA

TWO RUSSIAN ARTICLES

Translation and Introduction by

Rudolf Loewenthal

INTRODUCTION

In our day and age minority problems have become crucial, whether they are of a political, ethnic, racial, or religious nature. The Bukhariot Jews, living in the Soviet Union, comprise a small splinter group about whom comparatively little is known, though they were formerly in contact with Europe and China, as well as with other countries. The Judeo-Muslim Marranos, who have all but vanished, are an offspring of the Bukhariot Jews. I have translated the two Russian articles which follow because they are not readily available or understandable to many readers in this country. Moreover, these articles offer a small contribution to the turbulent history of Central Asia which has been systematically studied only during the twentieth century still leaving many gaps. New archeological finds in the Soviet Union, as well as in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, are adding currently to our knowledge of the history of that area.

Jews and Muslims, together with many other minorities, are at present undergoing severe trials to bring about their denationalization and to destroy their religious organization, the aim of which is to make them speak Russian and to sovietize their ideology.

The first authentic information in Europe about the Bukhariot Jews was furnished by a Protestant missionary, Dr. Joseph Wolff, a convert from Judaism, who visited Bukhara in 1832 and 1844.[1] The latest and most comprehensive account of them stems from the pen of the President of Israel, Itzhak Ben-Zvi.[2]

The Jews of Bukhara and the Turkestan Hinterland, according to oral tradition, settled there originally as exiles

from the kingdom of the Persians and Medes and were joined by exiles from Assyria and Babylonia. Their descendants withstood the Arab conquest under Qutayba at the beginning of the eighth century, the Mongol conquest in the thirteenth century, and of Timur-lenk at the end of the thirteenth century.

Russia conquered Central Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century and the territory of Bukhara was substantially reduced, but continued to exist until the Russian revolution under control of the Turkestan General-Gouvernement of Czarist Russia which was established in 1868. In 1918 the Soviets under Kolesov began to exert pressure for reforms under Mir Alim Kahn (1910-1920). The emir fled in 1920 and his regime was replaced by the Bukharan People's Republic (Bukharskaya Narodnaya Respublika) and was integrated into the Soviet Union under the name of the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic (Bukharskaya Narodnaya Sovetskaya Respublika) in 1924. Toward the end of 1924 the former emirate was transformed into the Bukharskij oblast' of the Uzbek SSR, including the city of Bukhara, while the Turkmen SSR and the Tadzhik ASSR (since 1929 Tadzhik SSR) absorbed portions of its territory.

The Bukhariot Jews speak Tadzhiki, a Persian dialect with Turkic influence, which is also spoken by the native mountain tribes and a large number of the urban population, as well as in most of the Tadzhik SSR.

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1 Narrative of a mission to Bokhara in the years 1843-1845, to ascertain the fate of Colonel Stoddart and Captain Conolly, by the Rev. Joseph Wolff, D. D., LL. D., 3rd ed. London, 1846. (The first edition appeared in 1845.) For biographical data cf. the concise article by D. M. Dunlop, "The strange case of Dr. Joseph Wolff," Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society, London, 34:3-4 (July-Oc. 1947), p. 320-323.

2 The exiled and the redeemed, by Itzhak Ben-Zvi, President of Israel. Trans. from the Hebrew by Isaac Abbady. Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 5718-1957.

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3 Ben-Zvi, op. cit., p.

4 Cited by Baymirza Ha
Darmstadt, 1956, p.

5 Julius Brutzkus, "Buc
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6 Brutzkus, op. cit., c
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The total number of Persian-speaking Jews amounted to some 200,000 people before World War II; about half of them formerly lived in Iran, but many of them emigrated, meantime, to Israel. Approximately 8,000 reside in Afghanistan, and about 60,000 in Bukhara and former Russian Turkestan.[3]

According to the Russian census of 1926 there were 18,698 native Jews in Central Asia, including 10,000 in Samarkand;[4] and the estimated number of Bukhariot Jews in Russian Central Asia was 30,000, including 10,000 in Bukhara.[5]

The Bukhariots compelled about one hundred Judeo-Muslim Marrano families to adopt Islam during the bloody persecutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[6]

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3 Ben-Zvi, op. cit., p. 67.

4 Cited by Baymirza Hayit, Turkestan im XX. Jahrhundert, Darmstadt, 1956, p. 217.

5 Julius Brutzkus, "Buchara," Encyclopaedia Judaica, Berlin, vol. 4 (1929), col. 1126. In addition, there were, in 1926, 25,866 Mountain Jews or Judeo-Tats of Dagestan in the Trans-Caucasus who spoke Tadzhiki or Tati, Persian sub-dialects. The Judeo-Tats were saved from the Nazis, but deported by the Soviet Russians in 1943 for alleged "collaboration" with the enemy. They have been dispersed, except for a remnant of 560 people who emigrated from Derbent to Palestine before World War I. (Cf. R. Loewenthal, "The Judeo-Tats in the Caucasus." Historia Judaica, New York, 14:1 (Ap. 1952), p. 66 and 80.)

The Russian census of 1926 contains a breakdown of various Jewish ethnic groups, while in the census of 1939 they are listed as a single community. No further data is available since, at the instance of Stalin, statistically the Jews are no longer considered a separate "nationality."

6 Brutzkus, op. cit., col. 1127. Babakhanov in article II claims that they numbered between 200 and 250 families.

According to W. Bacher and Elkan N. Adler some Bukhariot Jews settled in Jerusalem in 1893; they numbered at least 200 people in 1902.[7] Ben-Zvi, the best authority, is silent on this point in his recent book. Thus we may assume that they have been successfully integrated in Israel.

Finally, I would like to make a few remarks about the two authors. The first article by D. Iofan is meandering and written in rather crude Russian. In spite of intensive search I have been unable to trace any writings by S. B. Edel'man, whose research Iofan was trying to promote.

It is a matter of conjecture whether I. M. Babakanov, the author of the second article, written almost thirty years later, recovered and utilized the materials of Iofan. Judging by the name, Babakanov might be a Central Asian Turk. Of this we cannot be sure, because for various reasons the Soviet authorities frequently force people to adopt the names belonging to persons of different ethnic origin.

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7 "Bokhara," The Jewish Encyclopedia, New York-London, vol. 3 (1902), p. 295-296.

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D. Iofan, "Nauchnoe issledovanie istorii tuzemnykh evreev Bukhary i Turkestana 'chely' i chasti gornykh tadzhikov" (Research on the history of the native Jews of Bukhara and Turkestan, the 'chela,' and of part of the Mountain Tadzhiks). Novyj Vostok, Moscow, no. 1 (1922), p. 480-481.

During the past few years (1917-22) comrade S. B. Edel'man, a worker for cultural enlightenment, became popular with the native Jews of Turkestan and Bukhara. He carried on research of great and vital importance for the history of ethnography and literature of the indigenous Jews of the Central Asian countries, and also of the "chela" and part of the Mountain Tadzhiks.

His contributions which are arranged chronologically elucidate an unexplored aspect of the history of this branch of the Jewish people in the East, forgotten until the present time. The period and migrations of this branch which ended in Transoxania have been outlined, incidentally touching upon many aspects of the history of Central Asia.

The success of the work of comrade Edel'man is due largely to the trust on the part of the natives and the assistance of their learned and public men in connection with his beneficient and culturally enlightening activities among them.

It became possible to gain access to private and communal archives and also to become thoroughly acquainted and to study the way of life, as well as the structure of domestic and communal life in places previously inaccessible to any European.

Edel'man, in addition, obtained valuable material on the history of the "chela" (the group of Jews who adopted Islam) and also /on the history/ of some of the Mountain Tadzhiks.

His historical research covers the period beginning with antiquity (before the conquest of these countries by the Arabs) and ending with the years of the revolution. A clear

distinction has been made between history and legend and a lucid picture is created of how this branch of the Jewish people, while participating in the general struggle for independence, has preserved until quite recently a biblical simplicity and traditional family life, though somewhat altered outwardly by the Sharī'a of Islam, whose main bulwark in the East was Bukhara.

There were periods of brutal persecution (eighth century under Qutayba) when they gathered in concealed places for their religious services. The conquerors who persecuted heterodox people in every possible way compelled them to frequent mosques and to observe carefully the rites of Islam.

Furthermore, our researcher /Edel'man/ furnished a number of facts and names of historical significance which occupy an important place in the political and economic life of the country during the prosperous period (from the middle of the ninth century under Emir Isma'il and later in the twelfth century).

The indigenous Jews also participated in the rehabilitation of the country after the war ravages achieving special prosperity from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.

The period from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, when the decline of culture affected all the peoples of Central Asia, has been investigated in detail. This decline had a particularly painful influence on the legal situation of the native Jews.

Edel'man cites a number of documents limiting /the rights of the Jews/ which indicate the withdrawal of rights in all phases of life. Thus, for instance, the demarcation line in the cities and small villages, the size and direction of streets, the whole character of the dwellings, the type of clothing, form and color of headdress and, the compulsory rope belt are stressed. (Great importance is attached to the belt in the cult of Zoroaster; it protected the wearer against the influence of evil spirits, and was called "kosti" and obviously exercised influence on the tradition of later centuries. Even in recent times the belt has been especially decorated, testifying to the high position of the wearer.)

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The eternal fear for existence in the course of the past three centuries of persecutions and deprivation of rights chained the Jews to the ghetto, and they began to regard suspiciously anyone trying to penetrate into their midst until quite recently. With biblical stoicism they bore in solitude their suffering, believing in the hope of liberation.

World War I, and the Russian revolution /of 1917/ as its sequel, stirred the East. The history of the revolutionary struggle for independence testifies to the concealed aspirations to join the culture including all mankind. The revolution in Bukhara justified this hope and the aspiration of this oppressed people. Edel'man furnishes a number of facts and names relating to the struggle for liberation.

Concluding the review of this research work on the history of the indigenous Jews, I consider it necessary to draw attention to the fact that the author, at the same time, collected very interesting ethnographical material valuable for research on family genealogy and onomastica which comprises an important work almost ready for print. His research on the national epos and literature warrants special interest; until now they have been preserved in ancient Hebrew or Persian, portions of which are being translated by Edel'man.

Legends, songs, superstitions, and proverbs have been collected with great thoroughness. These prove the mutual influence of the Hindu cult and Zoroastrianism, and in their character they possess many traits in common with our Russian tales and superstitions.

These works are to a large extent illustrated by photographs, copies of historical documents, statistical data and diagrams, and /are replete/ with factual materials. Owing to the lack of necessary funds, however, it was impossible to finish the work entirely.

The French archeologist /Joseph/ Castagné, who was living in Turkestan and left for France at the end of 1920, repeatedly displayed special interest in the research of comrade Edel'man. Lack of space prevents a more detailed review.

Finally, it would be desirable and is hoped that the research and writings of comrade Edel'man will be published

and that he will also be given the opportunity to complete his important scientific work which has been interrupted because of lack of funds.

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Moscow, no. 3 (1951),

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I. M. Babakhonov, "K voprosu o priskhozhdenii gruppy evreev-musul'man v Bukhare" (On the origin of a Judeo-Muslim community in Bukhara). Sovetskaya Etnografiya, Moscow, no. 3 (1951), l. 162-163.

In the territory of the Bukhara emirate and in the cities of former Turkestan, where the Bukhariot Jews lived, there existed Judeo-Muslims. They are known by the sobriquet "chalja"; i.e., "half /Jewish/," "half /Muslim/." The term "chalja" became popular as a designation for this ethnic group, but was applied by outsiders only. The Judeo-Muslims themselves continue to consider it an insult. The term was felt to be derogatory by others too and was therefore not used within the hearing of the chelas.

The Judeo-Muslims lived mainly in the city of Bukhara with only a few residing in other cities of Turkestan. Those in Bukhara fled largely in order to return to the faith of their ancestors.

The number of Judeo-Muslims in Bukhara can only be estimated. No accurate census was taken of this colony in Bukhara before the revolution /of 1917/, and they were not listed separately in the Soviet censuses. According to oral tradition this Bukhara community numbered between 200 and 250 families.

The date at which this community was formed in Bukhara is unknown. It cannot be determined from ethnographical data which only states that their number increased by new conversions /to Islam/ during the past 100 or 150 years. The earliest recorded conversion of a Jew to Islam dates back to the time of Nasrulla Khan (Batyr Khan), who ruled from 1826 /1827; Trans./ to 1860.

After the conquest of Central Asia by Czarist Russia, the number of Muslims in Bulhara began to decrease because some families emigrated to /other parts/ of Russian Turkestan and returned to the Jewish faith. New conversions /to Islam/ did not take place.

Conversions of Jews to Islam were almost always compulsory. In most instances those subjected to conversion were those against whom serious accusations had been made regarding breaches of the shari'a laws. According to the sharī'a, conversion to Islam is considered a deed pleasing to God. The person who brings it about is guaranteed a place in paradise and is esteemed by those in power. Hence, quite a few /Muslims/ wanted to acquire both /these advantages/. Thus, when a Jew was accused and fell into the clutches of Muslim "justice," he was offered his life if he would renounce his faith and adopt Islam. Students of the medreses were particularly keen to convert Jews to Islam.

The threat of forcible conversion always hung over the Jews in the emirate of Bukhara. Lest charges be preferred against them, they acted as prudently as possible. But even this did not help in most instances. The most fanatic Muslims used stratagems in order to obtain the opportunity of converting a Jew to Islam. Various methods were employed /for this purpose/; for instance, if they met Jews in the street and asked him: "Infidel, whence did you return?" (Kofir, az kudzhó gashtí?), utilizing the fact that the word "gashtàn" means "to return" as well as "to turn away; to renounce," they construed his reply: "I returned from over there," as a repudiation of the Jewish faith. When the Jew began to deny in despair and indignation /that he had abjured the Jewish faith and adopted Islam/, they accused him of first abjuring the Jewish faith and becoming a Muslim, and then abjuring Islam too. This was a serious accusation; capital punishment was imposed for apostasy by the sharī'a. They immediately dragged the unfortunate /Jew/ before the judge and when there were people who testified under oath that the defendant had adopted Islam, he either had to confirm his conversion, or he had to prepare for his death.

The adoption of Islam was formalized before the qadī, who in the presence of witnesses had to hear personally the clear answer consenting to the acceptance of Islam. The usual form of reply was: "Praise to God, I am a Muslim" (Alhamdu li-llah man musulman). The new convert was given Muslim garments as a present: a robe and a turban. When the head of a family thus adopted Islam, all the members of his family were also declared to have embraced Islam.

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Special efforts were made by the representatives of the emirate authorities to draw to Islam /those/ people who were outstanding because of their position, their wealth, or their talents. Thus were turned into Muslims the master weaver Dovidi Ishra, kolontar /Pers., tax collector/ of the Hebrew community, Aroni Kandin, and the excellent singer, Borukhi Kalkhok. Their conversion dates from the rule of Emir Muzaffar-khan /1860-85/.

In addition to the usual forcible conversion to Islam under the threat of imprisonment or capital punishment, there were also individual cases of "voluntary" conversion to Islam under pressure. Such cases took place among the Jewish groups which led a precarious economic existence. The new converts were placed under strict surveillance. They were observed by fanatical Muslims and by a specially appointed person whose duty it was to teach the new converts the principles of the new faith and performance of the namaz prayers /five times a day/.

They were coerced to fulfill all the precepts of Islam. At the same time they were threatened by persecution and death for observing Hebrew customs and rites. The converts thus gradually absorbed many elements of Islam. These they combined in varying degrees with the Hebrew mode of life and consciousness of Hebrew elements.

For some Islam had become the religion of their fathers and grandfathers. They studied in Muslim schools, in the maktab /mosque/ and medrese /mosque school/ where they obtained an orthodox education. Others turned into fervent and even fanatic Muslims. We may assume that this group consisted of descendants of Jews who had been converted to Islam several generations back.

A second group, professing Islam as their inherited religion, secretely maintained some loyalty to Judaism handed down by the elder generation. Elements of both religions were amalgamated into one whole in their life and ideology, but with a clear prevalence of Islam.

Finally, there is a third group the members of which perform some Muslim rites, but are fundamentally Jewish. These are not infrequent among the Jews converted to Islam. Life in feudal Bukhara was for them especially difficult. By

observing secretely at home Jewish ceremonies and numerous Jewish religious prohibitions, they exposed themselves to mortal danger. The observance of interdictions relating to food caused especially frequent trouble since business relations sometimes did not entirely permit avoiding the sharing of the table with Muslims.

Some Judeo-Muslims surreptitiously trained their children in Hebrew learning, simultaneously with the teaching in the Muslim school (maktab), since the mastering of Arabic writing was useful in daily life. In their domestic ceremonies the Judeo-Muslims of this group also kept their Jewish tradition: they performed circumcision on the eighth day, practicing all the Jewish wedding and funeral ceremonies. These they performed after the obligatory Muslim rites.

The performance of Jewish and the non-performance of Muslim rites (for instance circumcision according to the Jewish and not the Muslim rite) they achieved with the help of bribes. That was possible only under the last emirs, after the organization of the Russian Political agency, when the Judeo-Muslims were not persecuted so severely. At that time, even under Muzaffar-khan, according to reports, all this was extremely difficult because of the strict surveillance of the entire life of the Judeo-Muslims.

The Judeo-Muslims usually married only among themselves. Intermarriage took place only in rare instances with Tadzhiks or Uzbeks from Bukhara. The Muslims were very reluctant to establish conjugal ties with them. No marriages were contracted between Judeo-Muslims and orthodox Jews.

Marriages among Judeo-Muslims were solemnized with Muslim marriage rites without fail. However, among the representatives of the above-mentioned third sub-group, these /rites/ were also strengthened invariably by the performance of Jewish wedding rituals which were considered as indispensable to legalize the marriage. Divorce was not recognized as legal, unless it was performed by a Jewish rabbi. To the Jews, in contrast to the Muslims, divorce had a religious character. Only after the Jewish divorce ritual was performed, did the Judeo-Muslims consider it possible to enter marriages, except for those who had completely gone over to Islam.

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Burials among all the various groups of Judeo-Muslims, without exception, took place in the cemeteries of the Sunnite Bukhariots according to the Muslim ritual. In the distant past this was done in order not to arouse comment and persecution. Later on it was kept up because tradition was established. But, side by side with the Muslim burial rites, some Judeo-Muslims secretely practiced the Jewish funeral rites.

All these factors made the life of the group quite peculiar and entirely different from the life of all other Bukhariot communities.

After the great October revolution /of 1917/, when the entire structure of feudal Bukhara was destroyed, the conditions which led to the formation of this /Judeo-Muslim/ group and which had imposed specific limitations, were completely abolished. The abolition of national inequality and oppression by the Soviet regime permitted the Judeo-Muslims to participate actively in the whole economic and cultural structure of Soviet Bukhara, and to overcome their former isolation and backwardness, the result of a gloomy and difficult past.